

REMARKS

The Office Action dated December 17, 2002 has been received and carefully noted. The following remarks are submitted as a full and complete response thereto.

Claims 1-16 are pending in the application. In view of the following remarks, reconsideration and allowance of claims 1-14 is respectfully requested. On page 4 of the Office Action, the Examiner has indicated that claims 15-16 are allowed. Applicant wishes to thank the Examiner for this indication of allowable subject matter.

I. CLAIM REJECTIONS UNDER 35 USC § 102

Claims 1-3, 6, 8-10 and 13 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. 102(b) as being anticipated by Ranta (U.S. Patent No. 6,356,739). This rejection is respectfully traversed and reconsideration is respectfully requested for the reasons which follow.

The priority date of the present invention, which was established by the corresponding PCT application no. PCT/EP99/03045 on May 4, 1999, precedes the U.S. Filing date of Ranta, which is June 21, 1999. A certified copy of PCT application no. PCT/EP99/03045 was filed with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office on March 21, 2002. According to 35 U.S.C. § 120, the effective filing date of the present application as established by the filing date of the corresponding PCT application no. PCT/EP99/03045 precedes the U.S. filing date of Ranta. Therefore, Ranta is not a valid prior art reference to this application under 35 U.S.C. § 102. Thus, withdrawal of the rejections and

allowance of all the claims since Ranta is not eligible for use as prior art is respectfully requested.

II. CLAIM REJECTIONS UNDER 35 USC § 103

Claims 4, 5, 7, 11, 12 and 14 are rejected under 35 USC § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Ranta (U.S. Patent No. 6,356,739) in view of Hakaste et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6,377,817). This rejection is respectfully traversed and reconsideration is respectfully requested for the reasons which follow.

As discussed above, the present invention is entitled to the benefit of the filing date of the corresponding PCT application no. PCT/E99/03045 filed on May 4, 1999, which precedes the U.S. filing date of Ranta, which is June 21, 1999. Therefore, Ranta is not eligible for use as prior art against the present invention. Therefore, it is Applicant's position that it is not necessary to submit any arguments to the PTO regarding this rejection.

CONCLUSION

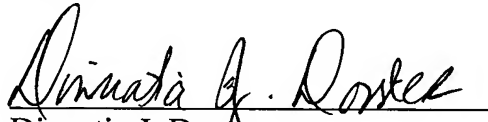
As discussed above, claims 1-16 are pending. Claims 15-16 are allowed. Since the effective filing date of the present invention precedes Ranta, Ranta is not a valid prior art reference as to this application. It is therefore requested that claims 1-14, like claims 15-16, be found allowable, and this application passed to issue.

If for any reason the Examiner determines that the application is not now in condition for allowance, it is respectfully requested that the Examiner contact, by

telephone, the applicants' undersigned attorney at the indicated telephone number to arrange for an interview to expedite the disposition of this application.

In the event this paper is not being timely filed, the applicants respectfully petition for an appropriate extension of time. Any fees for such an extension together with any additional fees may be charged to Counsel's Deposit Account 50-2222.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Dinnatia J. Doster", is written over a horizontal line.

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